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FACTORS RELATED TO THE EDUCATION AND JOB PLANS OF RURAL YOUTH.

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THIS REPORT OF SOME OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL PLANS OF RURAL HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WAS DERIVED FROM A STUDY OF APPROXIMATELY 3,000 JUNIOR AND SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ILLINOIS. THE STUDY TRIED TO DETERMINE THE APTITUDES AND SKILLS POSSESSED BY RURAL YOUTH, TO FIND THE PERSONAL AND SOCIOPSYCHOLOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THESE YOUTH, AND TO DETERMINE THE KINDS OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING THAT WOULD BEST FIT THEM FOR THE CAREERS AND OCCUPATIONS AVAILABLE TO THEM. THE AUTHOR CONCLUDED THAT THE EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL NEEDS OF NONCOLLEGE PRONE RURAL YOUTH ARE NOT ADEQUATELY MET. THESE STUDENTS, WHO COMPRISE THE MAJORITY OF THE GRADUATING STUDENTS OF MOST RURAL HIGH SCHOOLS, DO NOT GET AS MUCH HELP IN FUTURE OCCUPATIONAL PLANNING AS THE COLLEGE PRONE, AND ARE POORLY PREPARED FOR THE LIVES THEY FACE AFTER THEY GRADUATE FROM HIGH SCHOOL. THIS ARTICLE IS A REPRINT FROM "ILLINOIS AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS," JANUARY 1967. (DD)

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Factors Related to the Education and Job Plans of Rural Youth

D. E. LINDSTROM

THE QUESTION OF WHAT JUniors and seniors in rural high schools of Illinois plan to do for further education and jobs is important in these days of rapid social and economic change. The "push and pull" of forces bringing about change in rural communities has an important effect on youths. Increasing numbers are having to leave the community to find jobs and the majority find they must have education and training beyond high school to be prepared to get jobs they would like to have.

The research reported here was concerned with the educational and job plans of rural high school students and factors influencing them.[1] It was based on information from juniors and seniors in 31 rural high schools in eight widely scattered counties of Illinois.[2] The sample consisted of 2,929 usable sets of data about equally divided between juniors and seniors and male and female, but including more non-farm than farm youth. The purposes of the overall study of which this research was a part were (1) to determine aptitudes and skills possessed by rural youth, (2) to find the personal and socio-psychological characteristics of those youth, and (3) to determine the kind of education and training that would best fit them for the careers and occupations available to them.

This report centers attention upon the realistic[3] plans of rural youths, occupational choices, sources of information about jobs, student reaction to teachers, job experience, parental desires for their youth, expectations of help in getting started, preferences and basic concerns of the youths, and further job training needed.

Realistic Plans

Three-fourths of the youths included in the study reported they wanted more education beyond high school. However, only 41 percent had made realistic plans to go to college, while 35 percent planned to get further training in business schools, trade schools, or similar institutions.

The students realistically planning to go to university or college were called the college prone. The majority both of this group and of the non-college prone were certain what they wanted to do, but significantly[4] higher proportions of the former had definitely made up their minds. Over one-fifth of the non-college prone were not very certain of their plans. These doubtless were youths who lacked training for available jobs as they saw them.[5]

[1] Mrs. Ragwinder Dhindsa and Donald Smucker, graduate assistants in rural sociology in the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois, did the statistical programming for the research reported in this article.

[2] Other findings of the broader study from which this material is drawn are reported in a manuscript entitled "Realistic Education and Job Choices of Rural Youth in Illinois: Differences Between College and Non-College Prone," which has been submitted for publication by the Illinois Agricultural Experiment Station.

[3] Realistic plans refer to replies which indicated the youngsters had made definite decisions as to where they wanted to go and the kinds of jobs they wanted.

[4] Where differences between college and non-college prone are indicated, they are statistically significant as shown by chi-square tests. Detailed tables that show the findings of these tests may be obtained upon request from the Department of Agricultural Economics, University of Illinois, Urbana 61801.

[5] A special study made by this department of 3,558 migrants from areas 50 miles or more outside the city of St. Louis showed 70 percent were classified as inexperienced. 63 percent of these were in the blue-collar class.

One of the concerns of rural students is the distance they must travel to get further education or training. About a third (30 percent) reported they could not go more than 10 miles away; only 13 percent would travel up to 100 miles; only 19 percent were willing to travel outside the state; and 38 percent did not know. A higher proportion of the college prone felt they could not travel more than these distances. This would appear to be a fact of importance to those planning commuter colleges in the state.

Occupational Choices

The relationship between job choices and knowledge about jobs is important to rural youths who plan to seek jobs outside the home community. More than four out of five of all rural students stated they were fairly certain what occupational areas they wanted to go into. In this regard there are, as might be expected, differences between the college prone and non-college prone.

Seventy-one percent of the college prone reported they want to go into the professional, technical, and managerial fields, which call for college preparation. On the other hand, only 19 percent of the non-college prone indicated a desire to go into the professions or technical and managerial areas. Probably most of the non-college prone desiring to go into these areas were thinking about the managerial area; there are farm managers, for example, who are not college trained.

Most of the non-college prone hoped to go into blue collar jobs such as craftsman, foreman, farming-allied (including homemaking), operative and skilled labor, or into clerical, sales, or service occupations. Only a third of these students were certain of their specific job choice, yet 65 percent, compared with 73 percent of the college prone, had given a great deal of thought to their choice of occupation. Few (about 3 percent) failed to respond to this question, so it is evident that job choice was one concern to which practically all the students had given some thought.

Farming was a choice of occupation for only 5 percent of the students. There was little difference between the college and non-college prone in this respect. It can be assumed that this 5 percent was included among those enrolled in vocational agriculture or home economics.

The lack of finality of choice is shown in that 70 percent of all students had thought of two or more jobs. This is further indicated by knowledge of job chosen: only 23 percent had acquired "a great deal" of knowledge about it. This was especially the case of the non-college prone.

Sources of Information About Jobs

Family and friends were the chief sources of information about jobs ("friends" included holders of jobs similar to jobs that interested the students). Fifty-five percent used these sources. Only 19 percent reported they were aided by teachers and counselors; in fact, only 3 percent referred to counselors. These responses came from the students and not from school or other records. This indicates that these were the main sources of job information students were aware of.

College prone and non-college prone students did not use the various sources of job information to the same degree. More of the non-college prone went to friends, holders of similar jobs, and family members; more of the college prone looked to teachers and counselors. Most of the sources reported were non-professional — peer, family, and other non-school sources. It is of significance that more of the non-college prone used these non-professional sources.

Student Relations With Teachers

The fact that teachers had more influence on the college prone is of im-

portance, because "two of the most important decisions of a lifetime are often made while a person is in high school. These are choice of vocation and the education needed to prepare adequately for that vocation."[6]

Students responded to five general questions that were concerned with help obtained from teachers. Teachers' influence is shown by the data to be a differential factor, favoring the college prone. This is especially the case in helping students want to learn, helping them obtain a thorough grasp of the field, and making them feel wanted. But there also were significant differences favoring the college prone in the extent to which teachers reportedly earned the students' respect and understood their strong and weak points.

The fact that in most of these schools the curricula were designed primarily to prepare students for college undoubtedly was a factor in influencing students' responses. Students who were not thinking of going to college apparently felt that they were being neglected or that their teachers were more concerned about students who were planning to go to college.

In any event, a larger proportion of the non-college prone failed to establish rapport with their teachers. Care must be used in interpreting these results. It should not be assumed that the attitude expressed by the non-college students was primarily the fault of the teachers. More properly it could be attributed to the nature of the educational system, which favors the college-prone students.

Job Experience

Almost three-fourths (71 percent) of the students included in the study had held jobs for pay. Most of these jobs were for one year or less and all but 7 percent were in the blue-collar class. The jobs held longest were in the unskilled area, with skilled, including farm labor, ranking second; only 7 percent were in the clerical and sales area.

There were no differences between the college and non-college prone in job experience. There is no indication that jobs held gave job experience which was related to anything but unskilled work. It may be assumed that this job experience was of importance to the student in teaching what it takes to hold a job. Also, it may have helped to shape students' occupational preferences by making them more certain of areas they did not wish to pursue as a career.

Some substantiation of the lack of carryover from job experience to job choice was obtained by correlational analysis. There was no association between job experience and length of time on a job on the one hand and job choice on the other.

Only 27 percent of the students took trips to observe jobs. Larger proportions did this among the college prone than among the non-college prone.

Parental Desires

Two-thirds of the college prone students reported that their fathers offered them strong encouragement to go to college. A considerably smaller proportion of the non-college prone reported similar encouragement. Conversely, significantly more of the non-college group reported that their fathers suggested quitting school or never said anything about continuing their education.

According to reports by the students, more mothers than fathers strongly encouraged them to go on to school after being graduated from high school. This held true among both college and non-college prone. Even so, the proportion of the mothers offering such encouragement

[6] Bishop, Carol, et al. Educational and Vocational Goals of Rural Youths in Virginia. Va. Polytechnic Institute Agr. Exp. Sta. Bul. 560, p. 7. 1965.

was higher among the college prone. More mothers of the non-college prone suggested to their children that they quit school or never expressed a feeling about the matter.

Expectations of Help in Getting Started

Advice from parents, friends, or relatives (63 percent reported such counsel) overshadows all other influences as a source of help in making final decisions on job choices. Eleven percent reported that they expected such help from teachers and counselors (only 4 percent from counselors). More non-college prone got such help from family and peers; more college prone had the help of teachers and counselors.

Financial help in getting started was expected by 50 percent of the youths from parents, relatives, or friends. However, nearly as many (42 percent) did not expect such help. No help was expected from teachers or counselors. More non-college prone expected help from family and peers and more college than non-college prone expected no help.

Preferences and Basic Concerns

Although 95 percent of rural youths reported they did not want to farm, 80 percent reported they preferred to have their future homes in the open country, a village, or a small town. This was true despite the likelihood that at least eight in ten would have to go to urban areas to find jobs.[7] Students, especially those seeking white- or blue-collar jobs, wanted to live in the open country or small villages. A higher percentage of the college prone preferred to live in small towns. Only 19 percent of each group preferred city life. Obviously, these reactions were based on familiarity with life in rural areas and unfamiliarity with, and possibly some apprehension about, living in a city.

Preference for working with people and ideas rather than tools, machinery, plants, and animals was expressed by significantly more college prone. Nevertheless, the majority of all students (56 percent) indicated they preferred working with people and ideas, whereas only 25 percent said they enjoyed most working with tools, machinery, plants, and animals. There is evidence here of the need for education in working with people: more emphasis on social science in school and college.

The college prone, in higher proportions than the non-college prone, were concerned with challenging work and a chance for self-expression. The non-college prone more commonly were concerned with salary and security, good relations with co-workers, a fair boss, and the chance to be boss. Likewise, higher proportions of the non-college prone preferred old friends and to work for others, while higher proportions of the college prone preferred to find new friends and to be self-employed. These findings are important in view of the fact that few farm (and probably non-farm) openings will be available in rural areas. Most rural youths being graduated from high school will have to work for others and they will be faced with finding new friends, usually in the cities.

Further Job Training Needed

Only 7 percent of the students reported they had all the training needed for the jobs they wanted. Ninety percent said they needed more training. As might be expected, practically all of the college prone felt this way; yet 87 percent of the non-college prone also reported this need. Most of the youths said they thought needed facilities were available, but in naming them 99 percent of the college prone indicated a college or university, whereas none of the non-college prone

[7] Aiton, Edward W., Myth and Myopia—Blocks to Progress. Ext. Ser. Rev., U.S. Dept. of Agr., p. 10. Aug. 1963.

Table 1. — High School Job Training Course Work Desired by 2,929 Juniors and Seniors in 31 Illinois Rural High Schools in Eight Counties, 1963-64 School Year

Course work desired	College prone[a]		Non-college prone[a]	
	Courses available	Courses not available	Courses available	Courses not available
	(percent)			
Desired more course work	67	50	52	40
Academic[b]	49	39	27	13
Vocational and business	18	11	26	27
Desired no more course work	19	16	23	18

[a] Differences between college- and non-college-prone groups significant at 1-percent level.
[b] Includes sciences and humanities.

did so. 60 percent of the non-college prone pointed to business or trade schools.

The students were asked what courses they wish they could have taken in high school for specific job training. It is significant that 59 percent indicated the need for more course work while in high school. Only one-fifth of all students were satisfied with their high school education. The college prone, in the highest proportions, referred to the need for more courses in the humanities and liberal arts and, secondarily, in the physical, biological, and social sciences (Table 1). This was to be expected. Surprisingly, however, the humanities, social sciences, and liberal arts, as well as vocational and business education, were areas in which substantial percentages of the non-college prone wished they had received more training. This is important in view of the popular notion that students not planning to go to college should concentrate on vocational education. These students themselves feel they also needed more education in the humanities and social sciences.[8]

Summary and Implications

The central concern of the study from which this report is taken is the educational and vocational needs of non-college-prone rural youths. It seems evident from the preceding discussion that these students, who comprise the majority of the graduating students of most rural high schools, do not get as much help in future occupational planning as the college prone. It has been shown that, for this group, the most important influences on job choice come from the family and peer groups rather than from the school.

It is evident from this information that more attention must be given to the future education of the non-college prone. The majority of this group wants more education beyond high school. They are fairly certain of their plans. Most (70 percent) want to go into clerical, sales, service, craftsman, foreman, agriculture-related, operative, and skilled jobs. Farming was a choice of only 5 percent. But most of the students, especially the non-college prone, reported they possessed little knowledge about their choice of job.

Higher proportions of the college prone went to their teachers and high school counselors for information and advice. Similarly, higher proportions of the college prone felt their teachers were of help in such ways as making the students feel wanted, making them want to learn, and understanding their strong and weak points. Many in the non-college group indicated that teachers were preferential in their treatment in favor of the college

[8] A positive correlation between academic competence and mechanical aptitude tests in the broader study from which these data were taken nullifies the assumption that there is no relation between academic and occupational competence.

prone. This feeling presumably had its roots in the fact that the educational system in rural high schools has been oriented toward college preparation and so has better suited the educational and vocational needs of the college prone.

Most students had held jobs for pay, but this experience had little relation to the kinds of jobs they desired. Further training for their desired jobs was needed, according to 90 percent of the youths. Both college and non-college prone felt the need while in high school for more course work both in the humanities and liberal arts and in the physical, biological, and social sciences. Large proportions of the non-college prone felt that, in addition to these other courses, they also needed more vocational and business training.

Both groups preferred to have their future homes in the open country, a village, or a town, even though 95 percent reported they desired non-farm jobs. Most students also preferred working with people and ideas rather than tools, machinery, plants, and animals; this was true particularly of the college prone. Higher proportions of the non-college prone were primarily concerned with salary, security, and good relations with co-workers in their future jobs. Most of the college prone preferred challenging work and a chance for self expression.

These findings, which are supported in part by other studies, have implications especially as to the needs of the non-college prone. This is not to say that the college prone have no problems, but they are less pressing.

It is evident from this study that the non-college prone are poorly prepared for the lives they face after they are graduated from high school. Most small rural high schools cannot afford a broad program and therefore are primarily oriented to college preparatory training. Since most of the non-college prone are likely to go into white- and blue-collar jobs, especially the service-to-people types, opportunities should be made available to them for futher education and training, not only in the vocational, technical, and occupational areas, but also in the humanities, liberal arts, and social sciences.

Also, more attention must be given to professional counseling and guidance, especially for non-college prone rural youths. Most of them feel the need for advanced education, but they are not sure of what they want to do. Largely they get advice from family and friends, most of whom are oriented to the rural situation in which they live. Some means should be provided in the school system to enable the non-college prone to go to counselors who know what the students will face when they leave the community for advanced education or jobs. The employing community also could work more closely with the school in providing job experience related to desired jobs.

The fact that 80 percent of the youth prefer life in rural areas but must look to urban areas for jobs makes evident the need for providing some preparation, not only for jobs, but also for living in urban areas. The integration of academic, occupational, and life adjustment education seems imperative so that students in their high school years may have a more comprehensive and less provincial view of the preparation needed for modern urban life and work.

It is evident that the scope of education at the elementary and high school levels needs to be broadened. This implies the need for further reorganization of rural schools and the provision of added services, including professionally trained counselors. Since the majority of rural youths must migrate, the cost of rural schools should be borne to a greater extent by the total society and not so much, as has been the case in the past, by the people in the local rural community.